

# 7 Firefighter and Public Safety

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## FIRE FIGHTER SAFETY

Firefighting is an inherently dangerous operation that requires all personnel involved to exercise caution and judgment. The dangerous nature of this work does not allow any margin for error. If any fire or fuels management action cannot be carried out safely, another action must be utilized. Prevention of injury is the overriding consideration during all operations. It is the responsibility of each and every person involved in an operation to ensure safety. At no time will the protection of resources be placed before the safety of fire management personnel. The Fire Management Office at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park outlines safety policy in more detail in the *Fire and Aviation Management Operations Guide* (Addendum).

Using GIS analysis, the parks have identified areas that present high hazard to firefighters (e.g. steep, remote areas having explosive fuel conditions). In these areas, where firefighter safety mitigations are difficult or impossible to achieve, the park may opt for less aggressive control strategies and accept fire spread over a greater number of acres.

### Safety Committee

A Fire and Visitor Management division safety committee will address safety issues pertaining to the fire and fuels management office. Members of this committee will include branch chiefs within the division including the fire management officer. This committee shall advocate that all operations be carried out in accordance with established safety practices as set by *Reference Manuals 18, 58, and 60*, the Fireline Handbook (NWCG 410-1), OSHA, the parks' *Risk Management Plan*, policy, and the division safety plan (Addendum)

The committee is not meant to replace the role of fire program managers and first line supervisors, but rather to expand the availability of safety information for firefighters. Program managers and first line supervisors are responsible for the establishment of Job Hazard Analyses (JHAs) which are written descriptions of hazards and corresponding mitigations for fire operations. Program managers will regularly review, modify, and update JHAs. Furthermore, the established JHAs will be readily accessible for crews so they may be able to integrate them into daily operations and projects. Currently, these JHAs are available on the park computer network under *J:/share\_docs/safety*.

### Wildland Fire Program

Due to many decades of fire suppression, unnatural fuel loads have accumulated in certain areas of the parks creating the potential for dangerous fires. Firefighters will only be allowed on an active wildland fire after receiving proper equipment and training as specified in *Reference Manual- 18*. This includes an annual eight- hour wildland firefighter safety class. The fire

management office will coordinate this class and make it available to every firefighter each season. Instructors of this class will be qualified at the strike team level. Employees failing to attend will not be allowed on the fireline until class completion.

Furthermore, wildland firefighters must meet minimum physical standards for their assigned incident position, as defined in NWCG 310-1 “Wildland Qualifications Subsystem Guide.” Physical fitness/work capacity tests for wildland firefighters and other fire-qualified employees will consist of the “pack test.” Arduous duty medical exams must be taken once every 3 years by wildland firefighters. The exams only include stress EKGs if required by the examining physician or if the employee is over 41 years old.

### **Aviation Program**

A qualified aviation manager will manage air operations and assure that they are performed in accordance with Federal Aviation Administration rules and regulations, the Department of Interior departmental manual, and NPS Aviation Management Policy as outlined in Reference Manual #60. Furthermore, the park aviation manager will be responsible for establishing and updating the parks’ *Aviation Management Plan*.

### **Structure Fire Program**

The Structure Fire Coordinator (Kings Canyon DFMO) will manage safety in the structure fire program. Emphasis will be placed on proper training and physical requirements as outlined in National Park Service Director’s Order #58. The parks will be careful to distinguish between the requirements for structure and wildland fire. The two types of work are not interchangeable. Wildland firefighters will not be used in structure protection without proper structural fire training, appropriate medical examination, and fitness testing.

## **PUBLIC AND EMPLOYEE SAFETY**

During fire operations or extreme fire danger, fire use restrictions and emergency closures may be needed to ensure public safety (see Appendix M). These restrictions can also reduce the possibility of human-caused fires during seasonal drought or extreme fire conditions. Emergency closures (i.e. trails in a fire area) may be declared by an incident commander to prevent imminent danger. Consultation with the appropriate District Ranger will occur as soon as possible. For longer term restrictions or closures (i.e. Stage 1, Stage 2 fire use restrictions), a special order will be approved by the park superintendent and given wide distribution. For all restrictions and closures signs will be posted and maintained in appropriate areas.

Evacuation plans will be in place and ready in the event of an unforeseen dangerous wildfire. When a fire threatens visitor or employee safety, adjacent ranger districts need to be given as much advance notice as possible in order to achieve orderly evacuation. Park evacuation plans are kept at the district ranger offices and are activated when an emergency dictates the need. The evacuation procedures of park residents are also outlined in these district plans.

During certain fire operations (such as prescribed fires or fire use projects), the parks may decide to keep trails open and allow visitors access to the fire area. If this happens, firefighters and interpreters on scene will answer questions and give safety messages to the public. Firefighters or other park staff may also serve as escorts through fire areas. The parks will supply media representatives with personal protective equipment (PPE) when needed.

